The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Post 1/8/76

GOP Debacle at the Polls Forecast

By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

One of President Ford's top advisers privately forecasts a Republican debacle at the polls this year. His reasons are strictly economic.

On condition that we not identify him, he told us why he expects 1976 to be a bad year for Republicans. Here are his main points:

—More than 8 million Americans are out of work. Millions more, seeing their neighbors unemployed, are uneasy about their own jobs. They can be expected to vote overwhelmingly for the Democratic ticket.

—The inflation rate is running slightly above 8 per cent. This is slowly improverishing millions of Americans who live on fixed pensions. They, too, are almost sure to turn to the Democrats in November.

—Although wages are expected to keep up with inflation in the year ahead, most Americans are complaining about soaring prices. Not only are prices higher than ever but the quality of products and services has deteriorated. Americans are paying more for less. More than likely, the majority will register its displeasure by voting against the party in power.

—Americans are importing 40 per cent of the petroleum they use. For this they pay the oil potentates a staggering sum which must come out of the U.S. economy. Most Americans tend to blame the administration for the higher gas prices and the sluggish economy.

—Contrary to Republican gospel, higher prices haven't stimulated increased production. An alarming 30 per cent of our industrial capacity stands idle. Despite skyrocketing oil and gas prices, for example, the oil companies are opening fewer wells than they did at lower prices. This has undermined public faith in GOP solutions.

—The world demand for food has stimulated farm production, but the great grain companies and food processors have been banking most of the profits. Meanwhile, back on the farm, the farmers are caught in a cost squeeze. Many of them, usually conservative Republicans, may be restless enough by November to vote for Democrats.

—The President's economic advisers agree privately that his proposed budget provides less, not more stimulus to the economy. This may be the responsible way to curb inflation, but our source belives it will cost the GOP votes in November.

He points out that Americans, when their pocketbooks are pinched, tend to vote Democratic. That's why he is worried about the coming election.

Agents in Danger—The truth about the tragic death of Richard S. Welch is that the Central Intelligence Agency didn't properly protect its top man in Athens.

Like other CIA station chiefs around the world, Welch posed as a diplomat. But it was a transparent cover which foreign diplomats easily saw through. The CIA has never made more than a flimsy effort to disguise some of its regular agents.

Worse, CIA station chiefs are usually housed in residences, which are passed on to their successors. More often than not, the locations of these residences become the whispered talk of the diplomatic community.

The CIA put Welch, for example, in the same house that CIA station chiefs had occupied for the past 25 years. At least seven CIA station chiefs, according to our sources, had resided there.

In a letter to a former colleague shortly before his murder, Welch described the house as "very pleasant if somewhat notorious."

Footnote: CIA operatives around the world, meanwhile, have been endangered by publicity. CIA defector Philip Agee published the names of dozens of CIA agents and contacts in Latin America. The agents were quickly withdrawn but their local contacts were left behind. A number have received threats. In Uruguay, one contact miraculously escaped injury after an assailant emptied a pistol into his automobile at an intersection. In Ecuador, an engineer on Agee's list appeared at the U.S. embassy to plead for protection. Others have hired armed guards to protect their homes and children.